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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 ASHGABAT 000636

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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CENTCOM COMMANDER GENERATES INTEREST IN CASPIAN
ENERGY SECURITY

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Jennifer L. Brush for reasons 1.
4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

11. (C) During 20 June meetings with President Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov, Defense Minister GEN Agageldi Mammetgeldiyev, and State Border Service Chief GEN-MAJ Bayram Alovov the Commander of U.S. Central Command, Admiral William 1J. Fallon, found Turkmenistan's government open to energy pipeline diversification, supportive of the Global War On Terrorism and of Afghanistan, ready for more counternarcotics and border cooperation, and willing to explore Caspian maritime and energy security cooperation. The president reaffirmed the use of Mary Military Airfield in emergency situations, but firmly refused a written agreement (septel). He also refused to reconsider his administration's decision to shut down Embassy's surveillance detection program. End Summary.

LET'S START WITH THE CASPIAN

12. (C) President Berdimuhammedov welcomed Commander, U.S. Central Command, Admiral William J. Fallon, to Turkmenistan and with a New York Times reporter still in the room with local media for a spray photo opportunity - jumped into a discussion on Caspian Sea delimitation and the Trans-Caspian pipeline (TCP). With only Defense Minister Mammetgeldiyev and State Border Service Chief Alovov at his side,

Berdimammedov explained that Foreign Minister Meredov was not present due to a foreign ministers' meeting on Caspian delimitation in Tehran. After the press departed, Berdimammedov said delimitation was a complex and long-running issue. Turkmenistan largely agreed with Azerbaijan on the desirability of building a TCP, but Iran and Russia opposed them based on bogus ecological concerns. Falling back into Niyazov-speak, Berdimammedov said somewhat illogically, "I do not want political solutions, only economic ones and I will do what is best for my people; we will only sell gas for distribution up to the border." (Comment: The United States, Turkey, EU and others have consistently told Berdimammedov -- and Niyazov before him -- that the sales to the border, did not, in fact, constitute the most profitable route for Turkmenistan's hydrocarbon resources. The far more profitable route was for Turkmenistan's companies to have direct contact with the end-user, the customer. End Comment.)

GWOT'S FINE, BUT REMEMBER WE'RE NEUTRAL

13. (C) Admiral Fallon thanked Berdimammedov for the welcome and said he was in Ashgabat to meet Turkmenistan's leaders and hear their views on the country and region. While his primary focus within CENTCOM is Iraq and Afghanistan, this region is important to the world and he offered to assist Turkmenistan. He thanked Turkmenistan for allowing U.S. military overflights and a refueling facility at Ashgabat Airport, citing the complexities involved with supplying Coalition forces in Afghanistan. This was highly valued support to all our efforts with all the countries working toward stability in Afghanistan, and meant that Turkmenistan also was helping stop terrorists' and insurgents' efforts to destabilize Afghanistan. (Note:

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Discussion of use of Mary Airfield is covered septel. End Note.)

AFGHANISTAN, IRAN, AND DRUGS

14. (C) Berdimammedov accepted the Admiral's thanks and transitioned to describing Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region as stable. He said former President Niyazov had laid the groundwork for peace and stability in Turkmenistan during its first fifteen years of independence. Turkmenistan's neutrality policy meant that it did not seek to be involved in outside political issues, but rather was focused on economics and trade. Berdimammedov said he was continuing Niyazov's policy of good, neighborly relations with all countries. He already had met with the presidents of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, and Afghanistan's President Karzai would visit on 5 July. He noted that Turkmenistan also had to pay attention to Afghanistan and was providing as much assistance as possible - teaching students and medical specialists in Turkmenistan's schools and hospitals, as well as cooperating in the energy and cultural spheres.

15. (C) Admiral Fallon said President Karzai had expressed to him the previous day his concern about Iran. Although it provides economic assistance in western Afghanistan, it is playing a destabilizing role in the south and east. According to Berdimammedov, "I told President Ahmadinejad from day one (of his recent visit to Iran) that our countries will only have economic cooperation, that's all. So, to be honest, we didn't discuss political questions." Berdimammedov added that he had told Ahmadinejad Turkmenistan's only issue was that Iran was the main route for drugs out of Afghanistan. This was a common issue in which Turkmenistan was a transit country, and ready to work with Iran to strengthen the borders.

16. (C) Berdimammedov said the Afghanistan police were

ineffective in stopping the drug flow, but that Turkmenistan's State Border Service (SBS) was working hard. Nevertheless, drugs were getting into his country and referred to it as a problem, but not a big problem. A one-ton drug burn with diplomats in attendance would take place on 26 June in conjunction with a law enforcement seminar. Another one-half ton was destroyed earlier in the year. Admiral Fallon said building up Afghanistan's security forces was a top priority, but indeed the Afghanistan border police service was weak and its development was not progressing as fast as the army's.

17. (C) Admitting Turkmenistan also was having a hard time properly equipping and supplying its SBS units to increase border security, Berdimuhammedov said Turkmenistan was always interested in equipment to improve its search capabilities. Interdiction efforts were strengthened in May and June, based on the poppy harvest. Every single day drugs were seized from traffickers well-equipped with motorcycles, cars, and weapons. Some traffickers had sport motorcycles and were skilled in mountain driving, a fact he had shared with Ahmadinejad.

18. (C) Admiral Fallon said resolving this common problem needed cooperation among many countries and noted the leaders in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan reminded him that Turkmenistan also needed to sign the agreement to establish

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the UNODC's Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center (CARICC) in Kazakhstan. Berdimuhammedov said he had just signed this letter, since the drug problem would not solve itself and such cooperation must actively be pursued. Admiral Fallon pointed out that Afghanistan wanted to cooperate, too.

REGIONAL COOPERATION: TURKMEN-STYLE

19. (C) Admiral Fallon sought Berdimuhammedov's views on regional cooperation on the distribution of resources, such as energy and water. Berdimuhammedov said this was not a problem since Turkmenistan only wanted economic relations with other countries. Foreign companies had been invited to work in Turkmenistan, including U.S. companies. To the Admiral's question on Uzbekistan, Berdimuhammedov said that Turkmenistan had excellent relations with Uzbekistan in economic, social, and cultural areas. He met President Karimov at the CIS Informal Summit and Karimov would pay an official visit on 18 October. The energy companies involved in the Chinese pipeline also were interested in crossing Uzbekistan. Admiral Fallon noted that Uzbekistan had troubled relations with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with the result that they had not received any gas or electricity from Uzbekistan. Berdimuhammedov responded that Turkmenistan wanted to help Kyrgyzstan and recently had told its Foreign Minister that Kyrgyzstan could get gas through a branch off the Chinese pipeline, if Uzbekistan agreed. Admiral Fallon said that was the point, despite Turkmenistan's generous offer there were political problems between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan that were preventing this cooperation from occurring. Demonstrating Turkmenistan's policy was to avoid political issues, Berdimuhammedov helplessly said at one point there had been a proposal for Central Asian countries to meet to discuss regional issues. "We want to help Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, but ..."

110. (C) Following Admiral Fallon's comment that a north-south corridor with economic opportunities was forming through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the ocean, Berdimuhammedov said the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline was not off the agenda, although security in Afghanistan remained the prerequisite. Transit fees generated by TAPI would greatly help Afghanistan's economy. Admiral Fallon concurred, adding that despite some negative headlines, many

good things were occurring in Afghanistan. However, it needs much more electricity to prosper. Berdimuhammedov said Turkmenistan was ready to bring electricity to the border, but that first Afghanistan needed an internal power distribution infrastructure.

PRESIDENT INTERESTED IN CASPIAN ENERGY SECURITY

¶11. (C) Admiral Fallon said that pipeline and energy infrastructure security would be important to future energy development in the Caspian Sea, and that perhaps some maritime cooperation was possible to this end. Berdimuhammedov readily agreed. With regard to the TCP, pipeline and maritime security had to be discussed first. He recommended both sides talk about "powerful equipment" that the United States could provide to Turkmenistan to deal with the issue of Caspian security. The CIS' Caspian Force (CASFOR) had the mission of ensuring Caspian security, but

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because Turkmenistan was neutral, this was not an option for cooperation. Berdimuhammedov said Turkmenistan was willing for the U.S. military to discuss equipment and training issues with the Defense Ministry and SBS. Admiral Fallon acknowledged that it would be good for Turkmenistan to work with the United States to help maintain its neutrality and independence from CASFOR. (Comment: Turkmenistan government officials have rarely asked outright for assistance, but generally are appreciative when they receive it. "Powerful equipment" likely refers to additional maritime vessels, such as the former USCG Cutter Point Jackson, which was an U.S. Excess Defense Article (EDA) donation and is still operational in the SBS. In March 2007, the Defense Ministry began to express interest in U.S. support for the development of its non-existent navy. See DAO Ashgabat IIR 6 940 0013 07/Turkmenistan Armed Forces Increasingly Engaged in Development of Future Bilateral Military Cooperation Activities(U), 161206ZMAR07. End Comment.)

SURVEILLANCE DETECTION (SD) PROGRAM SHUT DOWN

¶12. (C) At the Embassy's request, Admiral Fallon raised the issue of the SD program being shut down. He would appreciate Berdimuhammedov's consideration to reopen this Congressionally-mandated security program. Visibly uncomfortable that Admiral Fallon had raised the issue, Berdimuhammedov said security in Turkmenistan was the government's responsibility and that he was sure an attack like 9/11 would not happen in Turkmenistan. Surveillance in Turkmenistan is the Ministry of National Security (MNB)'s job and "if the SD program is necessary, I'll let you know. Otherwise, it is not needed." After almost ninety minutes, Admiral Fallon thanked Berdimuhammedov and exchanged gifts with him. He joked that if Admiral Fallon was staying in Ashgabat, he would see security forces everywhere, so why duplicate this work with another program?

MOD SEEKS NAVAL COOPERATION

¶13. (C) In a separate meeting at MOD headquarters, Admiral Fallon and Defense Minister GEN Mammetgeldiyev had a friendly discussion on a broad range of military and security issues. As usual, Mammetgeldiyev was comfortable, hospitable, and articulate. Turkmenistan's Armed Forces are still young, have enough Soviet-era equipment and weapons, but really need support for the training and professional development of its personnel. He thanked Admiral Fallon for the value and applicability of U.S. training courses, proudly citing the growing numbers of Turkmen participants in the U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, Marshall Center courses, and military exchanges over the past six years. He hoped annual participation would continue to climb, although he did not express much interest in Admiral

Fallon's offer of English language training assistance, saying that the president had mandated everyone be trilingual in Turkmen, Russian and English and that every nursery school child was now learning English. He confirmed the Defense Ministry had just approved the recent Letter of Offer and Acceptance (LOA) for nearly \$1.5 million in Motorola TETRA radios. He evaluated U.S./NATO forces as playing a positive role in stabilizing Afghanistan.

¶14. (C) Touching on foreign relations, Mammetgeldiev reiterated Turkmenistan's policy that Iran had the right to

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develop & peaceful nuclear technology, but was fearful of Iran possessing nuclear weapons or other WMD. Mammetgeldiyev specifically pointed to efforts to resolve Caspian Sea delimitation issues with Azerbaijan as progress in his country's foreign policy.

¶15. (C) Picking up on the President's support for maritime cooperation, Mammetgeldiyev expressed interest in developing the Caspian Sea fleet. Admiral Fallon promised that the NAVCENT Commander would visit later this summer or early fall and could work on the details of such cooperation. The meeting ended with warm words, Admiral Fallon's invitation for Mammetgeldiyev to visit CENTCOM in Florida, and a gift exchange.

ALOVOV's ONE BIG PROBLEM: AFGHANISTAN

¶16. (C) SBS Chief Alovov and MNB Deputy Minister Hojmurat Altayev - the latter appearing without warning in the place of the still-missing-in-action State Counternarcotics Commission Deputy Chief Myrat Yslamov - then met with Admiral Fallon at SBS headquarters. While Altayev remained silent throughout, Alovov described Turkmenistan's frustration with the "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" and its border force. Alovov said "tons" of narcotics were coming out of Afghanistan, causing much work for the SBS. The established system of border commissars allowed the SBS to resolve low-level issues, but closer cooperation was difficult because the Afghan commissars were changed daily and procedural agreements between commissars did not last. (Comment: Post has difficulty developing programs with Turkmenistan government officials for a similar reason. End Comment.)

¶17. (C) Alovov was evasive on answering questions about trafficking routes, SBS training, the SBS relationship to the MNB, and Iran. When Fallon pressed on the topic of Turkmenistan's relations with Iran, Alovov said they had good, friendly border relations. The only issues were minor ones, such as cattle "illegally" crossing the border, which were handled well by the commissar system. Berdimuhammedov had begun talks to finalize border demarcation with Kazakhstan, to be followed by similar talks with Uzbekistan. The border with Iran was demarcated during Soviet times so there are no problems there.

¶18. (C) Alovov expressed gratitude for U.S. assistance to the SBS throughout the meeting, specifically thanking Admiral Fallon for maintenance trucks and equipment from EXBS handed over in May, the Point Jackson cutter, and the Imamnazar border checkpoint. In response to the Admiral's question about what additional assistance the USG could provide, Alovov requested Vehicle and Cargo Inspection X-Ray Systems capable of penetrating refrigerator trucks. (Note: Embassy's Export Control and Related Border Security Assistance program is considering this request. End Note.) Admiral Fallon encouraged Alovov to meet with the NAVCENT delegation coming later this year for assistance in monitoring maritime trade. The meeting ended with a gift exchange.

COMMENT

¶19. (C) Berdimuhammedov's skittishness in either going

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forward too quickly with the Americans or even in dealing with political questions at all, demonstrates both his healthy fear of his neighbors and his unease in dealing with foreign policy. Not having his chief advisor at his side, Foreign Affairs Deputy Chairman Meredov, probably also contributed to his reluctance to indulge in anything more than banalities. His dismissal of embassy's SD program likely shows his reluctance to take on his own security forces who might consider such a program a threat. Post will continue to raise this critical issue with Berdimuhammedov and his government.

¶20. (C) Now that Berdimuhammedov has given formal permission for his ministers to travel, post is optimistic that Mammetgeldiyev may take up Admiral Fallon's invitation to visit CENTCOM HQ. End Comment.

¶21. (U) Admiral Fallon has reviewed this message.

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